

# MEMO

**DATE:** October 5, 2006

**TO:** Energy and Environment Committee (EEC)

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**SUBJECT:** Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) Open Space and Habitat Chapter

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**SUMMARY:**

SCAG is currently developing the Open Space component of Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) in partnership with a consultant. To date, several workshops are scheduled throughout the region to evaluate the approach and receive technical input. Due to the quantity of work that remains in program development, it would be inappropriate to include specific performance outcomes until the program proceeds beyond the initial analysis, and a specific methodology has been identified. Nonetheless, the RCP Task Force directed staff to provide periodic updates to each of the committees regarding chapter development. It is anticipated that staff will return to the task force, and subsequently EEC, with quantified performance outcomes in November or December.

**BACKGROUND:**

During the prior fiscal year, staff engaged the RCP Task Force in discussion on potential performance outcomes for each chapter included in the RCP. Based on these discussions, a review of comparable plans, and available data, staff is now proposing initial performance outcomes along with the basic strategy intended to achieve those outcomes. At the September RCP Task Force meeting, staff presented outcomes for the Land Use and Housing, Open Space and Habitat, and Security and Emergency Preparedness chapters. At the request of the Task Force the Open Space and Habitat chapter proposal is being presented as an information item for review.

**ATTACHMENT:**

Open Space and Habitat goals and strategy

## REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

### Open Space and Habitat Chapter

September 2006

#### Goals and Strategies – Initial Proposal

##### *Overview*

The overall purpose of the Open Space and Habitat Chapter is to establish regional goals and an action plan – including measurable performance criteria for the protection of open space and habitat resources in Southern California. For purposes of this report “open space” is divided into three focus areas:

Natural open space - areas with regionally unique or threatened biological resources, large contiguous blocks of natural open space and areas that link large blocks of natural open space.

Community open space – recreation areas that function as regional facilities, open space that serves the daily needs or defines the character of local neighborhoods, and open space that connects or buffers land used in developed areas.

Agricultural lands – prime farmlands, lands covered by the Williamson Act, agricultural lands that function as buffers or linkages to natural open space and agricultural lands that are important components of community open space. Also all lands that currently have a General Plan Agricultural designation or have a designation that allows specific types of agricultural activities

SCAG will identify and designate lands within the SCAG region according to the following categories listed above. As part of the Land Use and Housing chapter additional lands will be designated as various types of “urban.”

##### *Goals*

1. **Goal:** Protection of natural open space areas identified as regionally important.  
**Description:** Inventory existing open space plans and programs to determine amount of natural open space under protection. Prioritize areas for protection.  
**Potential Quantified Goal:** acres preserved, percentage of priority areas preserved, reduction in the of loss of natural open space  
**Data considerations:** will utilize a combination of SCAG data sets and data acquired by the consultant, requires identification of baseline, measures the rate at which open space loss occurs. Factors for the prioritization of natural open space include biological value (type and condition). Factors for prioritization of community open space include accessibility, regional importance, population served and uniqueness.

2. **Goal:** Add community open space through infill/redevelopment.  
**Description:** Requires designation of “urban” parts of the region, cataloguing of infill areas and community open space  
**Potential Quantified Goal:** Increase in acres of community open space per 1,000 residents, increase in number of Compass partner cities using proposed design standards for infill/urban development  
**Data Consideration:** need to develop baseline for ratio, determine the types of community open space to include.
3. **Goal:** Preservation of agricultural lands  
**Description:** Requires designation of “urban” parts of the region  
**Potential Quantified Goal:** Reduction in agricultural acres converted to non agricultural use or from one agricultural use to another.  
**Data considerations:** need to determine rate of agricultural conversion and percentage rate reduction.

### ***Strategies***

Activities/Plan provisions – The above-proposed goals will be achieved by the application of a strategy involving the following actions. Through the development of the chapter, SCAG will establish the required levels of implementation action to achieve the specified goals.

#### **Provide programmatic incentives for implementation, including finance**

SCAG will identify resources to direct toward local agencies that choose to implement the provisions of this plan. Programmatic incentives include strengthened Intergovernmental Review (IGR), CEQA reform and/or General Plan consistency. Resources will include funds identified in the current state infrastructure bonds for regional planning incentives. In addition, SCAG will propose various new innovative finance mechanisms for this purpose such as benefit assessment districts, conservation tax credits, SAFETEA-LU (and other federal fund sources), Purchase-of-development rights, public private partnerships. Additional local funding mechanisms will be explored.

#### **Building and design standards, including green building (also a land use strategy)**

SCAG will develop a set of simple, broadly applicable standards for various types of urban development consistent with the 2% strategy. For example, regional centers identified in the 2% strategy should feature housing at a given range of density, floor area ratio, and orientation, etc. Further, SCAG will describe desired targets for green building.

#### **Land use and urban design standards (for community/infill development)**

SCAG will develop a set of simple, broadly applicable standards for various types of urban development consistent with the 2% strategy. These standards will focus on walkability, pedestrian friendliness, multi-modal systems and creation of community open space.

**Implement 2% Strategy**

SCAG will continue working with individual jurisdictions to collaborate on planning and development of key strategic growth areas identified in the 2% strategy.